196 secretly replaces the object in the new thatch. A white ox is sacrificed at the well.

The information collected on this ceremony is still fragmentary but the color of the clothing worn by those officiating, that of the victim, the number of bands of the loin-cloth, and the number of cowrie shells given by the griot to his sister, the origin of the gravel used as the seat for the Kéita are evidence that we have here a ritual executed under the protection of Faro (see Chap. II)

175 As early as the fourteenth century numerous travelers described the Bambara /xv/as organized into small groups headed by a chief and more or less submitting to the neighboring empires. This state of affairs lasted until the period of the Peul invasion of this region (in the seventeenth century) which founded two kingdoms and created a local aristocracy of mixed Peul and Bambara blood. The first of these kingdoms was that of Ségou, the history of which is partly known (1). The investigations centered particularly in this area; the chief

1. On the history of the Bambara we refer the reader to the well documented volume of L. Tauxier. Histoire des Bambara.

town which was a capital for a long time retains the traces of a well [197] organized legal system and religion. It is also in this area that, according to specialists, the purest dialect is spoken. (2)

2. The children of families sufficiently wealthy to afford it were formerly sent [556 191] to Ségou to live with affinals in order to learn how to speak well an elegant and pure language.

197 The Bambara dialects belong to the sub-group of Mandingo languages 212 of the Nigero-Senegalese group. (3) The Bambara know certain

3. See A. Meillet et M. Cohen. Les Langues du Monde /Languages of the World/, p. 546.

197 systems of signs and ideograms which may be considered as a sort of
212 writing and the study of which is currently pursued. The system from which all the others supposedly stem, the glã glã zo, has 226 ideograms which, according to informants, summarize the knowledge of the
[202] Bambara (1). On the other hand, the Bamba use a numerical system

1. See. p. 21. This system and two of the ideograms, of which to designates the mash of boiled cereals and by extension nourishment in general, will be the object of a comment by M. Griaule and G. Dieterlen. "Signes graphiques des Soudanais. L'Homme. /Graphic signs of the Sudanese man/." Cahiers d'ethnologie, de géographie et de linguistique, Hermann (in press).

On certain types of writing observed among the Mandé and the Vai, see J. Février, Histoire de l'écriture /The History of Writing/, pp. 528-529.

based on twenty. Moreover, an analysis of the texts collected, some of them quoted in this essay, has brought to light an /xvi/ important number of words which, according to informants, belong to an ancient language of Mandingo origin, now used as liturgical language. It is not within the framework of this essay to present this material or to comment upon it, but it is appropriate to note that the study of this vocabulary would contribute to an understanding of religious thinking among the Bambara.

173 The Bambara have a rather clear idea of their early history and even of their prehistory. They describe their ancestors with precision and know the phases of development of their technology. These premises are necessary to an understanding of their religion which, like the other institutions, is especially linked to this technological development. Moreover, the only observable remains comprise household furniture and utensils, transient but perennial material whose forms and ornamentation indicate the metaphysical principles on which their way of thinking is based.

177 It is appropriate not to neglect those influences which have acted
121 upon the Bambara through their contacts with other Sudanese tribes

772 This knowledge, derived from the Kéita of Mandé, is called glã glã zo and describes the timeless and primordial state that preceded the stages of creation. The word glã which indicates the original void, connotes at the same time the ideas of movement, awakening, re-awakening, and resurrection; glã is the principle of the inner universal movement of the cosmos and all that composes it. On the other hand, the term implies the idea that creation is continuous /3/ from the moment of its beginning and perpetually maintained in all things as well as in the universe taken as a whole (1).

[197]

1. The word glã belongs to the ancient language. The Bambara term closest to it in meaning is kununi, which means "reawakening, resurrection." Glã is the principle of the eternal resurrection of all things.

Glã, "full of its own emptiness and its emptiness full of itself," extended its power everywhere. It sounded "a voice of emptiness" which brought into being its double, dya; glã became two, thus indicating the primordial character of duality, the existential principle (2). The

2. It is said: glã ye lankolo nye, lankolo nye glã ye, glã ye a yere ke lankolo fla ye, lankolo fla ye a yere ke glã ye; "glã is the emptiness, emptiness is glã, glã made itself into two emptinesses, two emptinesses made themselves into glã itself."

two gave forth a damp substance, zo zumale, "cold rust," which came out as invisible liquid vapor and formed hard shiny substances (3).

3. glã ye koloya a la ka kr zo ye, boli tumbi kę šiši ye bali ye, ka kę dyi sumale ye, ka kę zo yele gele ye; "glã made a substance which was rust come out of itself; this emission was invisible smoke which then became cold water, the latter becoming a hard and shiny rust." The informant translated the word zo as "rust."

CHAPTER 2

LINGUISTIC DATA

A. Linguistic Classification

197 According to the classification by Delafosse (1), Bambara or

1. Delafosse, Langues du Soudan [Languages of the Sudan] (Meillet and Cohen, Les Langues du monde [Languages of the World]).

Banmana is a dialect of the Mandé or Mandingue language, which in turn belongs to the central subgroup of the Nigerian-Senegalese languages. It is, then, very close to the Dioula, Kassonké, dialects, which belong to the same Mandé language and which are spoken by peoples with whom the Bambara cohabit geographically. (The differences with the Soso, the Soninké, and above all the Peul are much more marked).

193 Among the Nigerian-Senegalese languages, Mandé is distin-
197 guished chiefly by four traits:

1. The nominal forms have almost completely disappeared.
2. Noun and verb are distinguished only by their respective places in the sentence.
3. Conjugation includes a large number of verbal aspects.
4. The subject, noun or pronoun, precedes the verb.

The disappearance of the nominal forms marks an important evolution in comparison with the archaic language, in which they are, on the contrary, of pronounced importance. Of all the Mandé dialects, Bambara appears to be the most advanced. It is characterized particularly by its extreme conciseness and by the deformation words undergo through excessive contraction.

B. Morphology

193 Bambara makes no differentiation by inflexions: nothing indicates whether a word is subject or object, whether a verb is present or past, active or passive. The words are absolutely invariable and

805 the angles represents 90 days (the year, for the Bambara, is 360 days).
815 The symbols are not merely mathematical; they form part of the daily life of the society. [18] The zigzags are a characteristic theme
[531] in the decoration of pottery, weapons, tools, sanctuaries, and houses. One finds them in agricultural techniques and in ritual dance figures. The universal rhythms of the earth and sky echo through all the activities of man and society. (1) Finally, another series of 16 signs

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[787]

1. Id., "Conception de l'écliptique chez les Dogons et les Bambara" [The Dogon and Bambara Conception of the Ecliptic]. [Ed., Africa, 1951.]

is habitually used in geomancy. It is interesting to note that these signs were used in a practical manner for correspondence. The Bambara chiefs used multiple combinations of them to send each other messages.

G. Local Diversities

197 Given the extent and the diversity of the regions where Bambara is spoken, it is no wonder one notices differences in pronunciation, and even in structure and vocabulary, from one province to another. At Kaarta the speech is not the same as at Ségou, and a Bambara of Ségou has trouble understanding a Bambara of Bougouni. This is due partly to the influence of other languages which are in contact with Bambara and which ultimately alter and modify it, and partly to the normal evolution of language within a group separated for centuries from its place of origin. It is interesting to note that in the Bougouni circle the conservatives in speech are the old men, while the women are the evolutionary element.

191 Traditionally, Ségou was considered the center for the most elegant Bambara speech. Before the conquest, children were sent to Ségou to learn the purest Bambara.